

From Folk Stage to Global Stage: Concept of Community Theaters as a Catalyst of Skill India scheme, Cultural Festivals and Tourism

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Abstract

Community theatre, as the name suggests serves as the medium of storytelling through the local lens of communities and to give it an even raw look, the theatre has amateur performers rather than professionals who give a realistic realm and preserve local culture. Madhya Pradesh, the heart of our nation, is rich in heritage and folk theatre traditions like Nautanki, Maach, Rai, Kathi and many more. This paper explores how communities theaters may empower a strong ecosystem that empowers not only the locals but the whole youth, women and culture. When such an initiative is integrated on a large platform, intertwined with national schemes such as Skill India Mission, Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, it will develop talent, revitalize cultural tourism and promote robust of opportunities. Using case study based on the theater groups of Bhopal such as Rangmandal and Rangvidushak, this paper analysis the problems faced by the practitioners today, the scope of community theater and implimentation. This paper analyses the barriers that restrict theater's sociocultural upliftment, poor market connections and funding delays. Furthermore, the paper focuses on providing solutions to enhance audience growth which will impact the tourism of the state, uplift cultural educations by drafting a roadmap through which schools and colleges and universities can dedicate one day of the year to such a platform and enhancing economic stability. It also proposes practical policy changes with the sole aim of certifying theater based skills (stagecraft, production and going digital,) through interventions like: 1. Incorporating local theater module into PMKVY/ NSDC curriculum. 2. Establish state fellowships and micro grants. 3. Embed theater into tourism circuits local festivals. 4. Mandate exposure to live folk performances for schools and colleges. 5. Launch Digital Archive portal for storing community theater details. Increased youth employment, increased earnings from cultural tourism and continued preservation of historical evidence are some of the expected results. To ensure measurable and full impact, the roadmap is outlined with details regarding the execution strategy, funding options and evaluation metrics.

Keywords: Community Theater, Bhopal Theaters, Folk Tradition, Government Tourism Schemes, Cultural Tourism

1. Introduction

The Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!).

Community theaters presents and unexplored yet highly promising and systematic approach towards social innovation and cultural preservation which can be aligned with Skill India Mission and Atmanirbhar Bharat. Incorporating such an idea will not only boost the tribal culture ecosystem but will also increase employability, tourism attractions and engagement from the upcoming generation who is unaware of folklores.

This paper explores the role of community theatres— particularly in culturally vibrant areas like Madhya Pradesh— in fostering inclusive development, cultural tourism and creative entrepreneurship. It centers on Bhopal’s theatre scene, analyzing groups such as Rangmandal and Rangvidushak, which preserve the essence of folk theatre while aligning with contemporary values.

2. Literature Review

As *Augusto Boal* has rightly said that, “ The Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!).” He observes that theater is not just a stage where conversations happen, or drama is displayed, it is dialouge that stimulates critical thinking and scrutiny about the observation of the daily life struggles faced by those who are marginalised. Scholars like Rustom Barucha have noticed that participatory theater or performances encourage and enhances collective reflection and social transformation. India has been using the mode of theater since a very long period of time to establish activism, education and introspection of reality. Only a handful of states have their own community theater such as Gujarat has Bhavai, MAAT group of Jharkhand, from **Safdar Hashmi’s Jana Natya Manch**, which used street plays for political critique, to **Habib Tanvir’s Naya Theatre**, which brought Chhattisgarhi folk narratives to the national stage, the art form has consistently mediated between tradition and progress.

3. Performing arts in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh has a profound folk theater traditon. Maach, which is highly celebrated in Malwa, is a musical theater which blends historical themes and narratives with folktales and fables. Similarly, Nautanki and Rai honor regional heros, dieties, cultural preservance and principles. Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal serves as the hub of the state's theater environment, which has been essential in fostering both traditional and contemporary forms.

According to an article published in *The Hindu*, 2015, “Electronic media and the onslaught of the western culture had impeded the growth of the theater, the theater too should be blamed for its fate because it tried in vain to modernise itself instead of sticking itself to the traditional form.” Approximately 35% percentrage shortage has been noiced in the folk theater due to shortage of funds and dwindling rural audience. Younger generations have become even less interested in these live art forms as a result of the digital age.

By 2025, the 2015-launched Skill India Mission hopes to have trained more than 400 million Indians in a variety of skills. However, its curriculum still only slightly represents the creative and cultural sectors. According to academics like Arundhati Ghosh of the India Foundation for the Arts, including cultural skills into national skill frameworks, such as scriptwriting and stagecraft, can promote sustainable livelihoods.

Cultural tourism significantly contributes to the Indian Economy wherein the country has seen 33% growth in the tourism sector. Folk culture generates revenue through handicrafts, local cuisine, folk performances, and spiritual sites, with initiatives like the [Shri Ram Path circuit](#) in Madhya Pradesh and the [PRASHAD scheme](#) developing these culturally rich aspects and supporting local economies, according to the PIB and Times of India.

4. Methodology

The research adopts a **qualitative case study method**, focusing on **two Bhopal-based community theatre groups: Rangmandal and Rangvidushak**. Primary data were collected through interviews with local artists, organizers, and audience members between January and April 2025. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, journals, and digital archives.

Objectives:

To examine the current status and challenges faced by community theatre in Madhya Pradesh.

To assess the potential of theatre as a tool for youth skill development and employment

To propose a framework for integrating community theatre with the Skill India Mission and cultural tourism.

Findings:

Rangmandal and Rangvidushak

Rangmandal is one of the most prominent theater groups that perform at Bharat Bhawan. It brings classical, folk and traditional performances round the year at the art space. Similarly Rangvidushak is an independent group which performs on satier, realsim and social mimics into its critic. Although creatively sound both the groups enjoy creative liberty and performance yet they lack funding irregularities, delayed grants and lack of systemic approach.

Both groups draw attention to the fact that theater-based abilities are not officially recognized. Under government systems, artists cannot translate their years of experience into quantifiable credentials. There is a great deal of opportunity for including topics like set construction, digital theater production, lighting and sound design, and direction in the PMKVY curriculum.

Tribal folk festivals dont happen round the year which makes the performance and artist to be heavily dependent on those dates of the festivals. By embedding live folk theatre within heritage circuits like Khajuraho or Mandu, states can diversify tourism while giving performers sustainable livelihoods, adding this into the curriculum of the upcoming generation they will be actively engaging in the theater form and will know more about such folklore.

Discussion:

1. Social and Cultural Relevance Beyond Seasonal Festivals

Theater is anchored strongly as an oral tradition and many tribal artists rely on festivals like lokrang, Bhagoria Haat to gain livelihood. But these performances have been progressively marginalized by urbanization. These days, local troupes face challenges like a lack of practice space, poor pay, and erratic audience interest. Setting up of Community Theaters could provide access to the history beyond these seasonal festivals and will eradicate the problem of stagnant livelihood. This could be achieved through year round engagement, broadcast plays, interviews, and recorded performances reaching both local and global audiences. This would also provide employment and a stage for tribes who wanted to perform but were refrained due to situational demands and circumstances.

Nityananda Javani: A model for integrating Community theaters

Nityananda Javani is a tribal community radio station which serves as an exemplar example of how heritage can be preserved and protected through localised media. Using this approach, Community theater could collaborate with radios to have a recording of plays, narratives, oral histories, tales and lore. It could also conduct live performances to be acted out anytime of the year instead of narrowing the concept to only folk festivals. Archival materials should be digitally stored with links to Digital India projects. Tribal stories are preserved in India's ongoing cultural memory rather than being restricted to transient festivals thanks to the combination of radio, theatre, and digital preservation.

Women joining such an initiative would also enable women empowerment and upliftment, since tribal females are mostly under a veil. Females would be powerful and will also get a voice of their own. It would not only generate employment for them but also uplift the marginalised section of the tribal community.

Need for Integration

All the heritage of the tribal history is scattered, some archives are stored in the National Archives of India and some have been displayed as a Museum (Tribal Museum, Bhopal). A collaborated Digital Repository combining the documents would centralise the access and amplify the effect of the community. Such an initiative would foster collective ownership and social capital. Theater visibility now has more options thanks to the digital revolution. The Ministry of Culture could set up a Digital Archive Portal to store local theater-related scripts, films, biographies, and training materials. Reaching diasporic audiences and building an online repository for India's intangible heritage are two benefits of digitization.

The PMKVY curriculum incorporates community theater modules that allow young people to obtain certifications in acting, production, lighting, and costume design. By bridging the gap between formal employability and creative enthusiasm, this aligns cultural activity with the frameworks of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Skill India. Incorporating tribal radio stories and Community Theater into Gen Z curricula will foster pride in and awareness of indigenous art forms. Students could turn passive learning into experiential education by acting out recorded folklore, taking part in radio plays, or working as theater interns. One suggested model is for

schools and colleges to set aside one day a year to promote community theater, either by presenting folktale adaptations or by hosting local troupes. In addition to preserving culture, this will improve pupils' communication and creative abilities.

5. Policy Recommendations:

5.1 Theatre Arts in the Skill India Curriculum

Theatre arts encompass a wide spectrum of skills—including acting, lighting, set design, sound production, and increasingly, digital theatre—that align closely with the vocational ethos of PMKVY/NSDC. Unlike conventional academic streams.

5.2 State Fellowships and Micro-Grants for Women

Establishing state-sponsored annual fellowships would provide vital financial security and allow artists to focus on creative innovation and cultural preservation. Women have historically organized powerful community theatre initiatives, yet face structural barriers in accessing resources. Micro-grants tailored for women-led groups would address gender disparities and enable sustained engagement in theatre, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions.

5.3 Theatre as a Catalyst for Cultural Tourism

Madhya Pradesh (MP), with its heritage-rich locales such as Mandu, Orchha, and Khajuraho, offers a compelling canvas for integrating live theatre into tourism itineraries. Live performances at heritage sites can enhance visitor engagement, provide local employment, and reinforce the symbiotic relationship between culture and tourism

5.4 Educational Exposure Mandate

Mandating at least one live theatre exposure program per academic year in schools and colleges can significantly enhance students' cultural literacy, empathy, and creative skills. Alongside, Partnerships between educational institutions and local theatre troupes can facilitate curated exposure programs.

5.5 Creating Digital Archive portal

A centralized online portal to document and stream community theatre productions would serve dual purposes: preserving ephemeral performances and expanding access to wider audiences. Digital archiving is critical for research, pedagogy, and cultural diplomacy, allowing for both synchronous (live-streamed) and asynchronous (on-demand) engagement.

6. Conclusion

Community theater lies at the Confluence of art, culture and aesthetics. Integrating such a theater would not only benefit the government but also to all the sectors of the society. The inclusion of theatre arts into the PMKVY/NSDC curriculum, undergirded by fellowships, micro-grants, tourism linkages, educational mandates, digital documentation, and robust public-private partnerships, holds transformative potential for India's cultural and economic landscape. This holistic model recognizes theatre not merely as entertainment but as a vital skill, livelihood, and medium for social change. Strategic implementation of these recommendations can foster sustainable livelihoods, preserve intangible heritage, and ensure that theatre—rooted in both tradition and innovation—continues to thrive across rural and urban India. Future research should

explore longitudinal impacts of these interventions and develop scalable models for other cultural forms within the Skill India framework.

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